



## Freedom of Information Request policy

2025-2026

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Approved by	Full Governing Body (FGB)

## **Purpose & Key Principles**

This policy outlines how Dorset Studio School fulfils its obligations under the **Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)**. The FOIA provides public access to information held by public authorities, including schools, and promotes transparency and accountability in public sector organisations.

This policy applies to all recorded information held by the school, regardless of format, and covers:

- Requests for non-personal information.
- The school's publication scheme.
- Procedures for handling FOI requests.

An FOI request—short for Freedom of Information request—is a formal inquiry made by a member of the public to **access general information** held by any public authority. It is a mechanism for promoting transparency and accountability.

The classes of information we currently publish are contained in **appendix 1 'Classes of Information currently published'**.

The school processes personal data in accordance with the **UK GDPR's seven principles**:

1. **Lawfulness, fairness, and transparency**
2. **Purpose limitation**
3. **Data minimisation**
4. **Accuracy**
5. **Storage limitation**
6. **Integrity and confidentiality**
7. **Accountability**

Requests for **personal data** are handled under the **UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018**. Dorset Studio School has **valid legal reasons** to process personal data. These include:

**Consent:** The parent/carer/family has freely given, specific, informed, and unambiguous permission for the school to process data.

**Contractual necessity:** Where the school is required to fulfil contracts in order to provide students with an education and wider experiences such as school trips and visits

**Legal obligation:** Where the school must process data to comply with legal requirements such as attendance returns, safeguarding, including child protection, and census returns

**Public task:** Laws give the school an official authority to deliver education, safeguard children, and manage pupil welfare. Processing personal data to fulfil these duties is considered a public task. Personal data will be processed for the following tasks:

- **Delivering education:** Managing pupil records, assessments, and progress tracking.
- **Safeguarding responsibilities:** Recording and sharing concerns with social services.
- **Behaviour and attendance:** Monitoring and reporting to local authorities.
- **Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND):** Coordinating support and liaising with external agencies.
- **School governance:** Managing governors' details and decisions.
- **Statutory reporting:** Submitting data to the Department for Education (DfE).
- **Legitimate interests:** Balanced against the individual's rights. This includes:
  1. **Alumni Engagement and Fundraising** provided there's a clear opt-out and minimal intrusion.
  2. **Marketing of wider curriculum experiences and relevant opportunities** that promote the school and personal achievement
  3. **Security Measures:** CCTV monitoring for safety and property protection.
  4. **Staff Development and Appraisal (in some cases):** Using anonymised or aggregated data to improve teaching quality or inform CPD strategies.
  5. **ICT and Network Monitoring:** Tracking usage to prevent misuse or ensure system integrity. This is balanced against staff and student privacy.

Even when outsourcing services to a new management provider (e.g. for IT, HR, finance, or MIS systems such as ARBOR), the school remains the **data controller**. This means the school is legally responsible for ensuring that personal data is processed lawfully, securely, and transparently.

Before the introduction of new data management providers, the school carries out due diligence to assess the provider's GDPR compliance, reviews its data handling practices and ensures that it is based in the United Kingdom or European Union.

In addition, the school has Data Processing Agreements (DPA) in place with these providers. It also conducts a Data Protection Impact Assessment to identify and mitigate any risks associated with data transfer.

Dorset Studio School will always inform parents/carers/families of changes made to new data management providers as well as the introduction of new platforms which use and store personal data.

### **Responsibilities**

- The **Principal, Jason Malone** has overall responsibility for compliance.
- Assistant Principal, Tracey Richards is the Data Controller and designated **Data Protection Officer (DPO)** managing requests and ensures procedures are followed.

- All staff must understand their responsibilities under FOIA and data protection laws.

### **Making an FOI Request**

Requests **must**:

- **Be made in writing (email or letter).**
- **Include the requester's name and contact details.**
- **Clearly describe the information sought.**

However, parents(s)/carer(s)/family and other data subjects **do not** need to provide a reason for the request.

**FOI requests should be made to Mrs. Tracey Richards at**

[informationrequests@dorsetstudioschool.co.uk](mailto:informationrequests@dorsetstudioschool.co.uk)

The school will respond within **20 school days**, unless the original request is unclear and/or **exemptions** apply.

### **Exemptions**

Dorset Studio School is required to disclose recorded information when requested. However, there are exemptions that allow or require them to withhold certain types of information. These exemptions are designed to protect sensitive data and personal privacy.

FOIA exemptions fall into two categories: **absolute** and **qualified**.

1. **Absolute exemptions** require no public interest test. These apply automatically and include:
  - Information already reasonably accessible (e.g. published online)
  - Any Court records
  - Information containing information relating to another individual that would breach the Data Protection Act
  - Information provided in confidence
2. **Qualified exemptions** require a public interest test.

These require a balance between public interest in disclosure and harm caused by release of data:

- Information intended for **future publication**

- **Investigations and proceedings.** Legal privilege covers any confidential advice given by legal advisers, solicitors and barristers.
- **Law enforcement.** Where information would or would likely prejudice law enforcement functions.
- **Prejudice to effective conduct of public affairs.** Information is exempt if in the reasonable opinion of a qualified person that the disclosure of information would inhibit the frank and free provision of advice or would prejudice the effective conduct of the school.
- **Health and safety information** is exempt if its disclosure would or would likely endanger the safety or physical or mental health of any individual.
- **Commercial interests** if the information is likely to prejudice the commercial interests of the school.

**The school will respond to an FOI request within 20 working days, even if refusing**

### **Charges for an FOI request**

Information is generally provided free of charge.

Charges may apply if:

- The request is manifestly unfounded or excessive
- The requester asks for multiple copies or formats.
- The cost of locating and retrieving the information exceeds **£450** This is calculated based on the use of staff time at £25 per hour and activities like locating, retrieving, and extracting information. If a request exceeds this limit, the school may:
  1. Refuse it outright
  2. Ask the requester to narrow the scope
  3. Offer to provide part of the information

### **Vexatious or Repeated Requests**

Under Section 14 of the **Freedom of Information Act 2000**, the school is not obliged to comply with requests that are deemed **vexatious** or **repeated**.

A request may be considered **vexatious** if it:

- Causes disproportionate or unjustified disruption, irritation, or distress.
- Is clearly intended to cause annoyance.
- Has no serious purpose or value.
- Is part of a pattern of obsessive or abusive behaviour.
- Places an unreasonable burden on the school's resources.

Each case will be assessed individually, and the school will document its reasoning before refusing a request on these grounds.

## **Repeated Requests**

The school is not required to respond to identical or substantially similar requests from the same individual if:

- A previous request has been answered.
- No reasonable interval has passed between requests.
- There is no new or relevant information provided.

If a request is refused as vexatious or repeated, the school will:

- Inform the requester of the decision.
- Explain the grounds for refusal.
- Advise the requester of their right to complain to the **Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)**.

## **Complaints and Appeals**

If a requester is dissatisfied with the school's response, there is graduated response to expressing dissatisfaction:

### **Stage 1: An internal review**

- Request an internal review by the school. The requester should submit a written complaint to the school within **40 working days** of receiving the response.
- Complaints should be addressed to the **Data Protection Officer** and should clearly state the grounds for dissatisfaction.
- The school will conduct an internal review and respond within **20 school days**.
- The review will consider:
  - Whether the request was handled in accordance with the FOI Act.
  - Whether exemptions were applied appropriately.
  - Whether the response was timely and complete.

### **Stage 2: Contact the ICO**

Contact the **Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)** if unsatisfied with the outcome of the internal review.

**Postal Address:** Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF

**Telephone number:** 0303 123 1113 (local rate)

Email: [icocasework@ico.org.uk](mailto:icocasework@ico.org.uk) (for casework and general enquiries)

### **Stage 3: First Tier Tribunal (information Rights)**

If the requester disagrees with the ICO's decision, they may appeal to the **First-tier Tribunal (Information Rights)**.

- Appeals must be lodged within **28 calendar days** of the ICO's decision.
- The Tribunal is independent and will consider whether the school and ICO acted lawfully.

### **Data Sharing and Security**

Personal data is only shared when legally permitted and necessary. The school uses secure systems and encryption where appropriate. It has safeguards in place to prevent unauthorized access, tampering, or data breaches. In order to maintain the effectiveness of its cyber security it regularly audits and updates security protocols.

- Staff receive regular training on data protection, including cyber-security. All staff receive **mandatory induction training** on FOIA and data protection through the National College. Refresher training is provided **annually** or when legislation changes. This training includes:
  - Recognising and responding to FOI and data subject requests.
  - Understanding data protection principles and responsibilities.
  - Identifying and reporting data breaches.
  - Secure handling and sharing of personal data.
- Governors and volunteers who handle data also receive appropriate training.
- Training records are maintained and monitored by the Data Protection Officer.

### **Data Retention**

The school retains personal data only for as long as necessary to fulfil its purpose and comply with legal obligations.

- Retention periods are based on guidance from the **Information and Records Management Society (IRMS)** and relevant legislation.
- A **Data Retention Schedule** is maintained and reviewed annually.
- Examples of retention periods:
  - **Student records**: retained until the pupil reaches **age 25**.

- o **Staff records:** retained for **6 years** after employment ends.
- o **Safeguarding records:** retained until the pupil reaches **age 35**.
- o **Financial records:** retained for **6 years**.
- Data is securely disposed of when no longer required, using approved methods (e.g., shredding, secure deletion).
- Archived records are stored **securely** with **restricted access**.

### **Data Breaches**

Any data breach must be reported immediately to the **Data Protection Officer**. Serious breaches will be reported to the **Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)** within **72 hours**.

### **Policy Review**

This policy is reviewed every three years unless changes in legislation come into force sooner. During this review, the Full Governing Body alongside the Principal and the Data Protection Officer (DPO) will consider:

- Compliance with current legislation and case law
- The efficiency in handling requests
- Transparency in exemptions and refusals
- The accessibility for all users
- Monitoring and reporting of requests to the Full Governing Body

### **FOI Publication Scheme**

This publication scheme follows a model approved by the Information Commissioners Office (ICO). This scheme describes the classes of information that we are committed to publishing on our website.

The school endeavours to publish as much information as possible for the purpose of public interest. However, it does contain information that we consider to be sensitive.

**See 'Appendix 1- Classes of Information currently published'**

**Appendix 1 - Classes of Information currently published**

Class	On the School Website
Dorset Studio School details Who we are and what we do	Name, address & telephone number
	The name of the Principal
	The name of the Chair of Governors
	A statement about ethos and values - B&R policy
	Information on admissions
	Information on the provision of students with SEND
	The number of students on roll
	The rates of authorised & unauthorised absence
	GCSE and Technical results
	The number of students studying for and achieving vocational results
	The arrangements for visits by prospective parent(s)/carer(s)
	The destinations of leavers
The Dorset Studio School uniform	

Class	On the School Website
Instrument of Government	The name of the school
	The category of the school
	The name of the Governing Body
	The manner in which the Governing Body is constituted
	The term of office of each Governor if less than 4 years
	The name of anybody entitled to appoint any category of Governor

	Agreed minutes of the Governing body & its committees
	Some information may be confidential

Class	On the School Website
<b>School Policies</b>	Accessibility Plan
	Allegations against members of staff
	Anti-Bullying Policy
	Attendance Policy
	Behaviour & Rewards Policy, incl.
	Careers Education Policy
	Charging & Remissions Policy
	Children with Health Needs policy
	Child Protection Policy, incl. Safer Recruitment
	Complaints Policy
	Curriculum Policy
	Data Protection Policy
	Freedom of Information Policy
	Equality Objectives
	Home School Agreement
	Online Safety Policy
	Remote Education Policy
	Risk Assessment Policy
	Sex & Religious Education Policy
	Special Educational Needs Policy
Special Educational Needs & Information Report	
Subject Access Request Policy	
Suspensions & Exclusions Policy	

	Uniform Policy
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Class	On the School Website
School Policies related to staff	Staff Appraisal Policy
	Staff Code of Conduct
	Staff Capability Policy
	Early Career Teacher (ECT) Policy
	Staff Disciplinary Policy
	Whistleblowing Policy

Class	On the School Website
How we are doing	Any statutory instruments, departmental circulars and administrative memoranda sent to the Principal by the Department of Education
	Destinations for DSS leavers
	Examination Results, including national attainment & progress measures
	OfSTED Reports

Class	On the School Website
What we spend	Allowances and expenses that can be incurred
	Executive pay over £100,000

	Pay Policy
	Pupil Premium Strategy